

Social Anxiety

I've got social anxiety.

At least that's what the doctor tells me. Often I feel like I have to try and avoid interacting with other people. It's because some people make me feel strange. I don't know what it is, but there's something I don't like about them.

It's not something that happens all the time. I can usually act normally around most of the people I meet. We can have pleasant conversations. I think I'm the type of person people want to be friends with. The real problems start when they come along.

If I spend enough time outside, I will always encounter one of them. It's inevitable. They look like normal people, but they're somehow different. There's something off about them. I know I sound nuts. You think, like the doctors do, that I have social anxiety issues that are the cause of me feeling this way about people. I thought that way too. At least, I did until yesterday.

I've got a brother named John. He worries about me. He's been attempting for some time to get me out and about and social again. A friend of his was throwing a party last night. John thought it would be good if I came along.

Normally I wouldn't have gone with him. Parties aren't really my thing. The idea of running into one of those people makes me more nervous than you can understand. But yesterday, for some reason, I was able to build up the courage to go. John would pick me up at my apartment thirty minutes before it started.

When the time came to leave I was ready. I'd even bothered to dress up in some nice clothes that I never really used that much. I was sitting on the couch when the doorbell rang. I got up to go exit the apartment, but before I left, I took a peek through the eyehole of my door. Looking through it whenever anyone was at the door was a habit I'd developed.

I pressed my eye up against the little glass circle and squinted. John was on the other side. I put my hand on the doorknob, but paused. There was something off. Nothing in particular, nothing specific that can be described in writing. He looked normal. But there was an aura about him that made me feel uneasy. He made me feel the same way they do.

I backed away from the door and the doorbell rang again. John called my name through the door. I stood for a couple of minutes as he continued to ring the doorbell and call my name. He mumbled something that I couldn't make out and left.

I retreated into my room to calm down and began to feel guilty. I'd agreed to let my brother pick me up and then refused to leave. I began to think about what the doctor had told me—that my fear of social interaction made me feel anxious around certain people for no reason. Now it was happening with my own brother. Would I be like this forever? I decided that I had to man up. I picked up my phone and texted my brother.

Can you still pick me up? I'll go to the party.

After a couple of minutes, I got a text. It was from John.

Of course I will! Sorry I haven't showed up yet. Not ditching you.
At the gas station.

I paused after reading the text, confused. I sent him one back.

What do you mean you haven't showed up yet? You were just at my door.

Shortly afterwards, I received another message.

I left a little late and just stopped for gas. No idea what you're talking about. You sure you're okay? Doing some pre-party drinking to calm the nerves or something?

I ended up cancelling with my brother. I was too rattled by what

had just happened. I spent the whole night thinking about it. About how whoever was outside of my apartment made me feel. About how he was not really my brother.

That was when I realized that the doctor was wrong. I don't have social anxiety. I have a gift, or rather, a curse. There are things out there. They act like regular people, but they're not regular people. They want to trick you. They'll even go to the point of impersonating your own family. For some reason, I have the ability to recognize one when I see one. But most people don't. You probably don't.

Whatever these things are, I don't think their intentions are good. But they're everywhere. They're all around you, and you don't even notice.